[P.373, A]

668 777 [756] [182]

One factor in the decline of the shaman as a principal in curative activities was the rise of the peyote cult in the mid-1930's (Stewart 1944). The cult was introduced by a Paiute who gathered a number of Washo followers. His cult or "way" has since been superseded by a strictly Washo group, following the Teepee Way (d'Azevedo 1957). The Teepee Way is an illustration of the effect an ethnographer can have on the lives of his subjects. A casual remark by an ethnographer that the peyote ceremonies carried out by the Paiute leader were not like those he had seen elsewhere motivated a Washo to drive to Idaho to find out for himself. This trip resulted in the formation of the new cult and the near dissolution of the group headed by the Paiute. Washo peyotism has incorporated much of the curing emphasis of Washo shamanism and much of the symbolism as well. The peyote button is reminiscent of the poison parsnip taken by old-time doctors (d'Azevedo 1957). The powerful eagle feather is reserved for the use of road chiefs just as it was the special symbol of the shaman or powerful warrior. The fans carried by most peyotists are often composed of magpie feathers. Curative peyote meetings are often conducted by a special chief, reputed to have very potent curing powers, who does not conduct the regular peyote meeting. Even in regular meetings one of the main emphases is on curing ailments of both the body and spirit.

756 663 178 [276] [237]

[755]

756 668 578 691 [648]

Led by an assimilated Washo, known by other Indians as a "white man's Indian," the shamans brought suit against the peyotists urging they be arrested and their meetings banned. They charged, among other things, that peyote meetings were occasions of sexual license. Such open accusations and the bringing of white men into a strictly Indian matter created a great deal of antagonism toward the shamans among the Washo, whether or not they were committed to peyote.

755 668

Peyote curing differs only in detail from shamanistic curing as these two stories may illustrate.

[782]

"Had three gallstones and them white doctors operated and they got a lotta little stones but pretty soon it was back. So I decided to pray. You know whenever an Indian wants to pray the first thing he turns to is water and tobacco. So every night when I went to the john [toilet] I'd roll a cigarette and pray to that Peyote. I'd say, 'I don't want to be sick so you got to help them white doctors. You got to get all those little stones together in one place.' That Peyote is a good medicine. I used to go to meetings and it helped me before. So every night I prayed to the Peyote to get them stones in one place. Then I went to the hospital and they operated and got out the biggest gallstone they ever saw. It would hardly go in a fruit jar. I told that Peyote that the job was too big for it all alone that it should just help them white doctors and get all them stones in one place."

[164]

Another informant, mentioned earlier as a peyote chief with special curing power, recounts the events leading up to the death of his former wife of cancer of the kidneys.

In 1942 the average annual income of 40 families at the Dresslerville Colony was $684 (Program of the Carson Agency 1944, 184). Incomes have since increased substantially above the 1942 figure. For example, in the summer of 1961 there were three electricians and a painter that commuted from Dresslerville to Reno every work day.

Washo reside today primarily in small shacks in Dresslerville, Carson City, and Reno, Nevada and in Woodfords and Colevilla, California. A large number of Washo have married out of the tribe and live in the communities mentioned above or in other parts of Nevada and California.

The general figures on the causes of deaths among Nevada Indians is probably indicative of certain elements in current Washo life (Heglund, et al. 1961, 43-43c). Non-Indians in Nevada have a higher frequency of deaths due to heart diseases and cancer while the Indians have higher death rates in the categories of violence, vehicle accidents, pneumonia, enteritis, tuberculosis, homicide, and suicide. "In the general accident category... Nevada Indian deaths are almost twice the proportion of that of non-Indians in this state. Homicide as a cause of death is five times greater among Nevada Indians than among Indians in other parts of the continental United States."

The following chronology is presented to give an overview of the important events in the history of Washo territory. Several of the events listed have not been settled by historians and may be only approximately correct as stated here. There is little of an ethnohistorical character to this outline, but it does provide a framework for relating changes in Washo economics to the facts of White contact.

1826 - (possibly 1825) Jedediah S. Smith brought a party of some forty trappers down the Humboldt, to the Walker River, and over Walker's Pass into California. In the same year he recrossed the Sierras passing Mono Lake on the way east (Thompson and West 1881).

1833 - Capt. B. L. E. Bonneville sent a trapping (and spying?) party under Joseph R. Walker into Spanish California by way of Pyramid Lake, up the Truckee River, and over the Sierras. Zenas Leonard wrote a diary of this trip (Nevada 1940, 289).

1841 - Capt. J. B. Bartleson took an emigrant party, with John Bidwell and Col. Joseph B. Chiles along, to the Carson and Walker rivers and over the Sierras into California by way of Sonora Pass (Nevada 1940, 289).

1844 - Col. John C. Fremont and his survey party, with Kit Carson along, passed Pyramid Lake, proceeded south through Carson Valley and on

central Great Basin. By the end of the 1840's there were a number of rest stations for emigrants, at the foot of new trails across the Sierras, in Carson and Eagle valleys, on the Truckee River, and in Sierra Valley. Thousands of head of cattle were grazed there, and wagon trains paused for months at a time waiting for the appropriate season for the final crossing. By 1859 gold had been discovered in the area, logging and lumber became a major industry, ranches and farms created a network of fences in most of the valleys, and numerous white settlements had sprung up containing a rapidly increasing population of permanent settlers, miners and laborers.

There is some evidence that the Washo may have suffered a drastic decrease in population and some tribal disorganization prior to these events of the 1840's and 50's. Extensive epidemics had raged through the Indian tribes of central California during the first few decades of the 19th century, and Washo legend contains numerous references to the devastation of entire bands by disease before the period of American settlement. There are also legends of early Spanish expeditions, the working of mines in the mountains, and the capture of Washo children. The publication of more of the records of these expeditions may bring to light material of considerable importance with regard to initial Washo contacts with non-Indians.

At the point of first intensive white contact in the late 1840's and early 1850's the Washo also appear to have been under attack from mounted groups of Paiute, and there is every indication that their willingness to cooperate with whites was a response to the need for protection from Paiute raiding. The Washo never adopted the horse for hunting or warfare as did their neighbors directly to the east, and this fact put them at a great disadvantage during the tumultuous years of competition between the newly emergent raiding bands of the Paiute and the white emigrants. That they never surmounted the effects of this initial inferiority of status is borne out by their almost total eclipse in official records during the remainder of the 19th century, and by the neglect of their desperate condition on the part of government and local administrators. This is all the more curious in view of the fact that they appear to have increased in population during the past hundred years, and have maintained viable social groups and cultural continuity.

Though historical documentation and early ethnographic comment concerning the Washo are meager, what resources do exist are of great potential value to the student of their culture. The first phase of the historical record is that marked by the journals and reports of trappers, explorers and emigrants prior to 1850. The initial venture over this section of the Sierras appears to be that of Jedediah Smith and a party of trappers who went into Spanish California by way of Walker Pass in 1825 or 1826. In 1833 Joseph Walker led a party of trappers up the Truckee River to California, and a diary of the trip was kept by Zenas Leonard, a member of the party.